

## EMPTY SPACES

When my system  
began to go into shock  
because I hadn't had  
a drink in days,  
I'd sell off  
some of my signed books:  
westerns and mysteries,  
none of them worth much,  
but half a dozen  
could buy me a bottle  
20 years ago.  
The books by  
people I'd liked best  
were last to go.  
It hurt to look  
at the empty spaces  
where books had been,  
but brandy, water  
and bad times  
didn't wash away  
what I'd had.  
A week ago, I sold off  
old letters and things  
I'd accumulated  
over 30 years  
and pretty soon  
I'll get a check big enough  
to make a down payment  
on a house out west.  
I'll be able to go home  
someday. Meanwhile,  
these aren't bad times.  
I always have  
enough to drink  
and a wife  
I want to stay with,  
not one I want to leave.  
But while I watched the men  
haul the stuff off,  
box after box, in the snow  
the day seemed dark.  
My wife said,  
"The house is neater now."  
I looked at the empty spaces  
and nodded  
but my hands shook,  
just a little,  
when I poured a drink.

-- Arthur Winfield Knight  
California PA